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AUTHOR Sanders, Carol S.
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ABSTRACT

A systematic approach to dissemination of vocational education research and development program improvement efforts is comprehensive, effective, and efficient. Systematic dissemination is a prerequisite link to assessing impact of research and development--for program improvement to occur, successful dissemination is crucial. A systematic approach to dissemination requires an operational definition of dissemination: development of individual dissemination plans; and coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among persons involved in the dissemination process. To promote use and consequently program improvement, dissemination activities must be planned, conducted, and followed-up. Dissemination planning is continuous; it must be incorporated in project proposals, revised as needed during the course of the project, and stepped up at the conclusion of the project so that project results do not become one more report on a recipient's bookshelf. All persons involved in the dissemination process--funding agency staff, project staff, networks/agencies that link funders/developers and target audiences, and target audiences--must cooperate. Each of these groups has its own role, and each reaps particular benefits from the dissemination effort. Further information on vocational education research and development dissemination can be found in the Illinois Research and Development Section's "Dissemination Planning Outline" in the "Request for Program Improvement Proposals in Vocational Education." (KC)

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# SYSTEMATIC DISSEMINATION
# of
# RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

A Presentation to The
American Vocational Education Research Association

by
Carol S. Sanders

American Vocational Association Annual Convention
Atlanta, Georgia
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Systematic Dissemination
of
Research and Development Program Improvement Efforts

The primary purpose of vocational education research and development activities is to improve vocational education programs. And for program improvement to occur, successful dissemination is of utmost importance. Successful dissemination is a prerequisite to individual research and development efforts making a difference.

For successful dissemination to occur, dissemination must be approached systematically. A systematic approach requires:

1. An operational definition of dissemination;
2. Development of individual dissemination plans; and
3. Coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among persons involved in the dissemination process.

Using the National Institute of Education's Dissemination Analysis Group's four-level definition as the basis, dissemination is defined in Illinois as any activity which assists a target audience to:

1. Become aware of an output and its content;
2. Understand an output and how it can be used;
3. Decide whether or not to adopt/adapt an output; and
4. Implement and continue to use an output.

The term as defined includes the concept of use.

The dissemination definition includes the term output. An output refers to those things produced as a result of project efforts. Outputs of projects may be considered to be primary (main project efforts) or supportive (those efforts which enhance the development or dissemination of the primary effort). Research and development projects produce

different types of outputs. These program improvement outputs can be classified into five categories:

1. General information (e.g., guidelines, public relations materials, rules and regulations);
2. Reports (e.g., research studies, project final reports, bibliographies);
3. Supplementary or resource aids (e.g., handbooks, "how-to" guides);
4. Educational products (e.g., curriculum materials, professional development materials); and
5. Intangible educational innovations (e.g., models, concepts, programs.)

Users of vocational education program improvement outputs include a wide variety of populations. However, the typical user group is composed of vocational educators. Program improvement outputs are usually developed with a specific target audience in mind. It is to this audience that initial dissemination is targeted.

The definition of Dissemination as defined in Illinois suggests "four levels of assistance" that need to be provided for potential users. The definition implies a progressive process one must go through to eventually use a vocational education program improvement output. The process provides a structure for planning effective dissemination activities. To promote use and consequently program improvement, dissemination activities must be planned, conducted, and followed-up.

There are a variety of dissemination functions, procedures, activities and techniques. These cannot be tied into a neat package which can be applied to each and every output being disseminated. Rather, different

outputs require different dissemination plans. Dissemination planning is individual to the type of output being disseminated, the target audience, the persons doing the planning, conducting, and following up of the dissemination activity, and the availability of time, money and human resources. Dissemination planning is continuous. Dissemination is thought about and preliminarily planned for at the proposal writing stage of a funded effort. The guidelines that accompany the Illinois Research and Development Section's Request for Program Improvement Proposals in Vocational Education call for the inclusion of a "Dissemination Planning Outline." The Outline incorporates:

1. Identification of current fiscal year dissemination goal(s)
   a. Indication of outputs to be disseminated
   b. Identification of target audiences
   c. Determining the extent of dissemination (awareness, understanding, decision, and implementation)
2. Identification of particular dissemination activities
   a. Indication of individual dissemination activities including: (1) the output to be disseminated (2) the audience to be affected and (3) the extent to which the activity will assist the audience
   b. Indication of person(s) responsible for individual activity(ies) and if possible where each will be conducted
3. Identification of followup activities
   a. Indication of followup efforts to be conducted for individual activities to collect information related to: (1) effectiveness of the particular dissemination activity, (2) identification of additional assistance needs, and (3) intended use

b. Indication of followup activities to be conducted following all dissemination efforts to determine the extent to which the output is being used.

Dissemination plans in proposals start the dissemination process for each project. As each project progresses, the activities contained in the plan are conducted and revised as needed. Dissemination plans are updated with each additional project funding phase. Dissemination continues throughout the funded effort and beyond. It is at the completion of funding, when the primary project output(s) has been developed, that dissemination activities should be accellerated. Unfortunately it is at this time that dissemination activities often dwindle and the results of research and development frequently end up on someone's bookshelf, never to be used for their intended purpose. There is a particular need at this time, as there is throughout the funded effort, for coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among all the persons involved in the dissemination process:

1. Funding agency staff (funders);
2. Project staffs (developers);
3. Networks/agencies that serve in a linking capacity between the funders/developers and target audiences (linkers); and
4. Target audiences (users).

Without people who are willing to share knowledge, information, and resources, dissemination efforts are doomed to failure. Therefore, it is necessary for all involved to be aware of and understand the roles and responsibilities of each of the groups involved.

The dissemination role of the funding agency staff is facilitative, evaluative, and advisory in nature. Responsibilities include:

1. Providing assistance to project staffs as they formulate,

conduct and followup dissemination plans and particular dissemination activities;

2. Determining appropriateness of plans and activities, and using followup information to monitor project efforts and outputs;
3. Determining quality and dissemination commitment for primary outputs;
4. Facilitating the coordination and collaboration of project staffs and appropriate information agencies/networks; and
5. Facilitating post-funding dissemination efforts.

The dissemination role of the project staff is part of the scope of work identified in the proposal for funding. Project staffs engaged in research and development program improvement efforts are responsible for carrying out the dissemination activities included in the proposal. The project staff plays a central role in assuring success of dissemination efforts by taking responsibility for planning and following up dissemination, locating appropriate information agencies/networks and other resources as needed, and generally overseeing the dissemination process. Thus the dissemination responsibilities of the project staff include:

1. Preparing a dissemination planning outline at the time of proposal writing;
2. Revising and updating dissemination plans as the project progresses;
3. Coordinating linkage with appropriate information agencies/networks;
4. Following up overall project dissemination efforts planned and conducted during the funded effort, and

5. Providing information and recommendations for post-funding dissemination efforts.

The dissemination role of information networks/agencies is to serve as a link between program improvement output developers (project staff and state agency staff) and potential users (target audience) of the outputs.

Responsibilities include:

1. Collaborating with project staffs to assist with dissemination efforts which may involve planning, conducting, and following up particular dissemination activities;
2. Helping local level educators identify and clarify their needs;
3. Assisting local level educators in matching appropriate program improvement outputs with their identified needs; and
4. Providing appropriate technical assistance to users for adopting/adapting outputs.

Although users (target audience) are primarily affected by dissemination activities they do have responsibilities to facilitate successful efforts. It is the users responsibility to:

1. Identify and clarify program improvement needs;
2. Seek out information regarding the availability, usability, and effectiveness of program improvement outputs; and
3. Articulate and communicate the type of assistance needed or wanted to adopt/adapt program improvement.

Along with roles and responsibilities, benefits accrue for those engaging in systematic dissemination. Benefits to the funding agency taking on dissemination responsibilities include:

1. Greater visibility and success for funded projects;

2. Greater ability to monitor project activities and outputs;
3. Increased job efficiency and effectiveness;
4. National and statewide leadership recognition; and
5. Recognition for self and state agency.

For project staff benefits include:

1. Greater success and visibility for developmental activities;
2. Personal satisfaction at seeing outputs used and appreciated;
3. Recognition by colleagues; and
4. Increased opportunities to attain career goals, e.g., writing articles, presentations at state and national meetings, increased visibility in the field, consulting opportunities.

Benefits for information networks/agencies include:

1. Increased ability to do their job;
2. Greater visibility among colleagues and in the field;
3. Opportunity to work with a variety of people; and
4. Personal satisfaction in providing a useful service.

And some of the benefits to the target audience include:

1. Greater chance of having needs met;
2. Increased ability to do a better job; and
3. Opportunities to participate in decision making.

Coordination, cooperation, and collaboration of these groups facilitates the systematic approach to dissemination, an approach that is comprehensive, effective, and efficient. Systematic dissemination is a prerequisite link to assessing the impact of Research and Development -- remembering that for program improvement to occur, successful dissemination is of utmost importance.

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